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# Lafayette Regional Xpressway NEWSBRIEF



P.O. Box 60485  
Lafayette, LA 70596

## HNTB Team

To learn more about the LMEC and the LRX project, visit the website: [www.lrxpressway.com](http://www.lrxpressway.com); or contact Mrs. Elaine Abell, LMEC Chair, P.O. Box 60485, Lafayette, Louisiana 70596, Phone: (337) 233-6200; or contact Mr. David Flanders, HNTB Corporation, 10000 Perkins Rowe, Suite 640, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70810, Phone: (225) 368-2800, Fax: (225) 368-2801.

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## Open Road Tolling

The LRX is intended to be a "closed system" with a series of mainline and ramp toll collection points. Open Road Tolling (ORT) is the future of toll collection on expressways across the country. ORT gives you the freedom to drive straight through a toll collection point without having to stop or slow down. There is no need to search for change to pay the toll or decrease your speed as you approach the tolling

area. The future of tolling is an open road expressway that automatically deducts your user fee without you have doing to anything beyond driving straight through it. Nation averages show that 400 vehicles can pass through a manned toll booth per hour per lane versus ORT which allows over 2000 vehicles per hour per lane. It is just a matter of time before all toll plazas join the dinosaurs and systems across the country exist without any tollbooths or congested toll plazas.

Not only will this make your travels on the expressways more free-flowing and improve air quality, it will also save you money by only tolling you for the portion of the road you travel. All of LRX's expressways will have gantries that will span the roadway at predetermined points and only toll you for the sections of the expressway you use. This will move the Lafayette region forward in an innovative and equitable way to all its users.

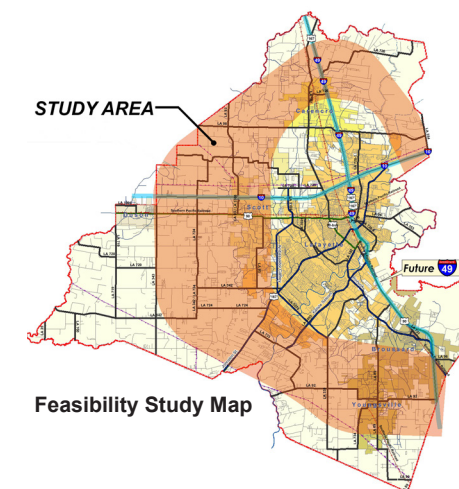
## Plans for Moving Forward...

Over the years, numerous transportation studies have been performed to address increasing development and population concerns in the Lafayette region. After local government consolidation in 1996, the North/South Beltway project, as it became known, became a priority for the Lafayette Consolidated Government. In December 2001, a Joint Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Subcommittee was formed to review previous North/South Beltway studies, analysis and options. In November 2002 the MPO Subcommittee submitted a final report acknowledging that a "limited-access interstate highway design standard" expressway was desirable; however, it was beyond the financial capability of local government. Given the funding shortfall, the MPO Subcommittee recommended that the North-South Beltway be pursued as a four-lane divided roadway using exist-

ing Lafayette Parish roads. Even with this modified design, a public funding source for the North-South Beltway was never identified.

By passage of Act No. 893 in 2003, the Louisiana State Legislature authorized the creation of the Lafayette Metropolitan Expressway Commission (LMEC) to promote, plan, finance, develop, construct, control, regulate, operate and maintain limited access tollways or transit ways within its jurisdiction. The enacting legislation declared that available public revenue sources, including federal funding, had not kept pace with Lafayette's growing transportation system needs. Therefore, the legislation directed the LMEC to pursue innovative and alternative funding sources to be used to improve the Lafayette regional transportation system through development of an efficient, safe, and well-maintained limited access highway system. If feasible, the legislation tasked LMEC with implementation of the facility.

To fulfill this directive, the LMEC commissioned a Feasibility Study for the Lafayette Regional Xpressway (LRX). Completed in July 2005, the Feasibility Study evaluated a potential toll road loop corridor starting at US 90 south near Broussard and Youngsville running west around the City of Lafayette, across I-10, north around Carencro, across I-49 North and back around to I-10 east of Lafayette. Following review of the study results, the Louisi-



Feasibility Study Map

ana Department of Transportation and Development (LDOTD) and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) recommended eliminating the portion of the loop from I-49 North east to I-10 corridor due to environmental concerns and low feasibility.

Plans to develop the remaining expressway corridor and facility have progressed to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) phase. NEPA requires evaluation of the potential environmental impacts posed by the project. This evaluation will be performed using a Tiered Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process. This process divides the EIS development into two tiers; a more general evaluation of project area-wide potential impacts and corridor selection (Tier 1) followed by more detailed examination of impacts posed by specific

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alignments within the selected corridor (Tier 2). The Tier 1 EIS is currently examining a set of potential corridors identified in the Feasibility Study. At the end of Tier 1, a Record of Decision (ROD) will be issued and the selected corridor will be carried forward into a Tier 2 EIS.

## PURPOSE & NEED

The purpose and need was developed through public involvement and agency coordination. The following agencies have been involved with developing the purpose and need for the Lafayette Regional Xpressway:

- Lafayette Consolidated Government, City-Parish President;
- Corps of Engineers - New Orleans District;
- LA Department of Wildlife & Fisheries;
- US Environmental Protection Agency;
- Natural Resources Conservation Service;
- US Coast Guard; and
- LA Department of Natural Resources.

**Purpose:** The proposed LRX project is to effectively and expeditiously enhance the regional and national transportation systems by improving system linkage, increasing capacity and accommodating transportation demand, and responding to economic development within the greater Lafayette area.

**Need:** The existing Lafayette transportation system has been determined to have inadequate capacity to accommodate existing heavy travel demand and anticipated increased travel demand caused by considerable on-going population growth and expanding economic development. An integral part of the region's long-range transportation plan is improvement of north-south mobility.

## Feasibility Study Completed in July 2005

The preliminary feasibility study focused on three general corridors – Outer, Middle, Inner - and researched potential environmental constraints, preliminary design, preliminary cost estimates, preliminary traffic and revenue estimates and potential funding mechanisms. A feasibility study was completed in July 2005.

## Consultants Begin Environmental Evaluations

The feasibility study provides the groundwork for further evaluation of the project as required by the National Environmental Policy Act. The United States Congress passed the National Environmental Policy Act, 42 United States Code 4321-4347, (NEPA) in 1969 to establish a national policy for consideration and communication of impacts to the environment from actions of the federal government.

The regulations implementing NEPA require federal agencies to consider the environmental impacts of major federal actions prior to executing the action. Communication of the impacts to the public and solicitation of input and comment on the impacts are also required. Federally-funded transportation projects, such as the LRX, are subject to these requirements. NEPA requires LMEC to include consideration of the environmental impacts and the comments received from the public and other stakeholders in the action eventually taken. In order to ensure opportunities to achieve the purpose of the action and minimize impacts to the environment, NEPA requires consideration of reasonable alternatives to achieve the goal of the action. Where impacts to the environment cannot be avoided, the federal agency is required to take measures to reduce or mitigate the environmental impacts.

The environmental evaluation for the LRX is being conducted using a tiered approach. Tier(ing) is often used for complex projects because it allows planners to conduct analysis and decision-making in a phased fashion – from broader to narrower focus. This allows for evaluation on issues that are most critical for a particular stage of the process. For the LRX project, the Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is examining five potential corridors for the loop facility (Common 1, Common 2, Outer, Inner, and Middle) and the potential impacts of pursuing the project as a toll facility. The corridor identified as preferable in the Tier 1 EIS will be documented in a Record of Decision (ROD). The Tier 2 EIS will focus on potential alignments and facilities within the selected corridor to develop more refined analysis of project details and potential impacts. The Tier 2 EIS will be used to identify a selected alignment, detailed facility design, and right of way requirements within the corridor. This determination will also be documented in a ROD.

NEPA evaluations are intended to ensure that public opinion and comment on the purpose and environmental impacts of federal actions are incorporated into the decision making process. The process of providing information to the public and soliciting input is called Public Involvement and is a critical aspect of the NEPA phase of this project.

## Innovative Financing

By passage of Act No. 685 of the 2006 Regular Session, the Louisiana State Legislature created a state Transportation Mobility Fund (TMF). Act 685 establishes the structure of the TMF including its purpose, the field of qualifying projects, how the program is administered, and how a particular project/toll agency can qualify for a financing grant. In conjunction with toll enabling legislation previously passed, the TMF will provide funding alterna-

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tives for transportation mega-projects throughout the state. The TMF may also allow for the issuance of bonds against the Fund itself and supplement the anticipated toll revenues expected from a project to fund the project construction. The next step legislation will be for the purpose of generating and collecting a new annual revenue stream dedicated to the TMF.

## Mobility Program Description

The TMF is targeted for urban area mega-projects where communities help themselves by accepting the toll method of delivery for their facilities. The toll-funded nature of a project indicates a faster delivery of the tollway will be accomplished than a roadway funded by traditional means. The LRX and Baton Rouge Loop are examples of urban area projects that will be good candidates as toll projects and therefore would qualify for financial assistance from the TMF. Projects in the New Orleans, Lake Charles, Shreveport, and Monroe urban areas, the Highway 1 extension to Grand Isle, and the Zachary Taylor Parkway are examples of other projects that may also qualify to participate in the TMF opportunities. In addition, the TMF can potentially assist in completion of I-49 and perhaps other interstate facilities if tolls are deemed as the most acceptable way to finance these facilities.

As initial Mobility Fund bonds and project level toll revenue bonds are paid off in 15 to 30 years, the Mobility Program will become an ongoing economic engine for Louisiana. Unencumbered project level toll revenues will be reinvested into expanded or new transportation facilities in Louisiana. State level revenues dedicated to the Mobility Fund bonds can either continue to be invested in Louisiana transportation or could be rededicated to some other use.

## Public Private Partnership

By passage of Act No. 304 of the 2006 Regular Session, the Louisiana State Legislature authorized the Louisiana Transportation Authority (LTA) to enter into Public Private Partnership (PPP) agreements to construct toll transportation facility projects. Louisiana's PPP legislation allows the LTA to receive proposals from private investment firms for the construction, maintenance and operation of transportation facilities.

New financing models have become commonplace across the nation to meet the demand for additional capacity transportation systems. Traditional public funding continues to fall behind this demand. It has become necessary for leadership in providing innovative, creative and multiple financing approaches to build much needed transportation systems and not rely on any single financing model. The Louisiana State Legislature continues to search for initiatives to identify new revenue sources and provide economic development.

## Public Involvement

Public Involvement is an ongoing process from the project conceptual stage through construction and it encourages and solicits community input. With community input, better transportation decisions can be made that benefit the community. The process provides opportunities for interactive participation throughout the planning, environmental, preliminary and final design, right-of-way (ROW) acquisition and construction phases. Early interaction with the public and stakeholders helps the project team to: a) Build trust and partnerships; b) Allow collaborative discussions to improve decisions; c) Avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts in the community; d) Narrow the field of alternatives and alignments; and e) Provide a project that is supported by the community and meets current and future mobility needs for the region.

During the environmental documentation phase of the project, public involvement is critical to developing an understanding of community needs. A Public Involvement Plan (PIP) was developed prior to beginning the EIS process. The PIP is an important element in ensuring that project and community needs are identified and addressed. The plan investigates the needs of the project and community, outlines opportunities for sharing information with the interested stakeholders, identifies methods of communication and tools that can be used in communicating, and details the times and dates of specific public interactions. For the Tier 1 EIS, public involvement to date has included three public meetings, public meeting purpose and need survey, agency scoping meetings, solicitation of views, media briefings, stakeholder interviews, and a newsletter. The summary of Tier 1 EIS public involvement to date can be found on the LMEC website: [www.lrxpressway.com](http://www.lrxpressway.com).

## Why a Toll Road...

Toll roads offer a financial alternative for funding needed transportation improvements that would likely never be built under the traditionally funded transportation programs. With toll roads, the users of the highway system pay the cost of its construction, operation and maintenance. Toll roads will not replace the existing tax funded highway infrastructure but will supplement those roads by providing an option for motorists who choose to use them.

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